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Create self-extracting ZIP files with WinZip 6.3

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Abstract (Article Summary)

By using WinZip 6.3, you can create ZIP file archives of files you wish to send as email attachments. WinZip Self-Extractor allows you to turn those files into self-extracting ZIP files, so even if the recipient of your email does not have an extraction utility, they will be able to decompress and read the files you send.

Full Text (962 words)

You probably already know about Nico Mak Computing's handy add-on WinZip 6.3 and its ability to decompress ZIP files you download from the Internet. This article highlights another of WinZip's features, WinZip Self-Extractor Personal Edition, which you can use to create self-extracting ZIP files. We'll show you how to create a ZIP file archive, save an existing file as a ZIP file, and how to turn that file into a selfextracting ZIP file.

Why zip your file?

A ZIP file is actually an archive of one or more compressed files stored in Phil Katz' ZIP file format. Archiving files makes them easy to group for transporting and copying, while compressing files saves space.

So, when should you create a ZIP file? One instance when this ability comes in handy is in sending email attachments. If you plan to send several files or one large file as email attachments, sending them as ZIP files means less download time for the recipient. The person you send a ZIP file to will need to use an extraction utility (like WinZip) to decompress the file before she can read it.

However, if you send the file as a selfextracting ZIP file, your recipient will be able to decompress the file without needing a ZIP extraction utility. That's because a self-extracting ZIP file is an executable program file that includes a ZIP file and the software to "unzip" the contents of the file. For that reason, self-extracting ZIP files use the file extension .exe while ordinary ZIP files have .zip extensions.

Using WinZip

Once you've downloaded and installed WinZip, you'll have the option of using WinZip's Wizard or Classic interfaces. For the examples in this article, choose the Classic interface seen in Figure A. Before you create your ZIP file, you'll need to create an archive in which to store it. To do so, choose File I New Archive to open the New Archive dialog box. Now, name your archive. We named our example archive Something or Other. Next, choose a location for your archive and click OK.
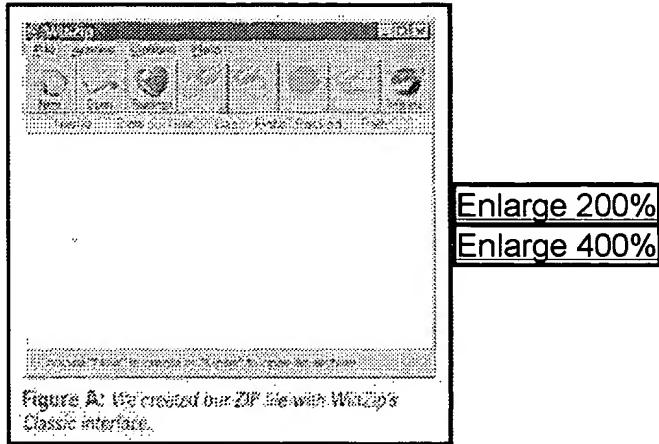

Enlarge 200%
Enlarge 400%

Figure A:

Once you've created an archive, you'll want to add some files. WinZip anticipates this by displaying the Add dialog box shown in Figure B. Use the Add From field to select the file you wish to zip. Once you've made your selection, click Add, and WinZip compresses your file and adds it to the archive, as shown in Figure C. Your file is now officially "zipped." The Classic WinZip interface lists details about each file in your archive. For instance, the Ratio column tells you how much the ZIP compression reduced each file.

You can also add files to your archive by dragging them from Windows Explorer and dropping them into the archive. WinZip will show the Drag And Drop dialog box, as seen in Figure D on page 14. To add this file to your archive, just click the Add button. When you drag and drop files into WinZip, they aren't deleted from their original location. If you wish to actually move these files to WinZip, select Move Files in the Action field of the Drag And Drop dialog box.

Using WinZip Self-Extractor

Now that you've created a ZIP file, making it self-extracting is a breeze. Just select the file and then choose Actions I Make .EXE. to display the WinZip Self-- Extractor Personal Edition dialog box shown in Figure E on page 14. You can choose a Default "Unzip To" Directory or leave this field blank to send the file to your TEMP directory. You can also choose whether to create a 16-bit file that runs under Windows 3.1, Windows 95, and Windows NT, or a 32-bit file to run under Windows 95 and Windows NT.

Once you've set the specifications for your file, click the Make .EXE button to make your ZIP file self-extracting. WinZip will create the file and ask whether or not you'd like to test it. It's a good idea to make sure the file functions properly before sending your newly created file off to its intended recipient. To do so, click Yes. Then, in the next screen, click Unzip. This will decompress your file in the default folder you specified previously in the WinZip Self-Extractor Personal Edition dialog box. WinZip will advise you that your file has been successfully unzipped. Click OK and use Windows Explorer to find and open your file. Once you've checked to see that the file unzipped properly, you can go ahead and add it as an attachment to your email message.

Where to get WinZip 6.3

WinZip 6.3 is available in a 32-bit version for Windows 95 / 98 / NT or a 16-bit version for Windows 3.x or Windows for Workgroups. WinZip's registration fee is $29 for a single-user license. You can download a fully functional evaluation copy of the program (in a self-extracting ZIP file, of course) from WinZip's Web site at www.winzip.com.

Note